AN UNSCIENTIFIC VIEW OF THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

From the Pall Mall Gazette.

SIR: The following account I have just received of a strictly unscientific observation of the transit of Venus may perhaps be found worthy of a place in your valuable journal. Ramleh, I would observe, is a suburb of Alexandria.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant, G. B. H.

RAMLEH, Dec. 10, 1874.

All the people here, save ourselves, got a notion that the transit of Venus was to take place this morning instead of yesterday; so we were the only unscientific people who saw it. The day before was cloudy, and during the night we had a storm so violent that I thought the windows and even the roof in danger. We had prepared smoked glasses and borrowed a big telescope, but had little expectation of seeing the sun the next morning. Half an hour before sunrise I was called, and felt very little inclined to get up to be disappointed. However, I did get up, and was out on the terrace before the time. The rain had stopped; heavy clouds filled the heavens save in the east. Long rays of light were shooting up into a clear bit of sky. I fixed the telescope, put blue spectacles on, and waited with my bit of glass ready for the appearance of his Majesty above the desert. Up he came in golden glory. Half of him was still below the horizon, when I saw through the glass a round black spot, like a distant cricket-ball, just entering the disc. Time by my watch, 6:55; but as observers go by infinitesimal divisions of seconds, and my watch is not particular to five minutes, I would willingly sell the observation cheap. My lady entered on her golden path rather high up on the left shoulder of the sun, and evidently intended only to traverse a thin slice of the upper half of the disc. She went very slowly, her motion being no more apparent than the hour hand of a clock. I called N., and we watched the small round spot alternately. I sent next door to invite them to come and see, but M. was in Cairo, and G. and A. in bed. The former could not, and the latter would not come. We sent off a smaller telescope and some smoked glass to the C.s. I tried to interest the Arab servant. I failed to make things clear, as our knowledge of a common language is limited, but he got so far as to know that something was wrong with the sun that morning. I tried to make him see Venus, but he first blackened his face with the smoked glass and then knocked the telescope stand down, and finally walked away shaking his head, and saying "Malesh" (never mind). I had a great business to get her ladyship in focus again. The sun was very fierce, and smoked glass was insufficient, so we got a bottle and filled it with ink and water, and found that much better as a medium of safe observation through the telescope. Now the clouds were blown back by a shift of the wind, the sun was covered, and a squall of rain filled the plain. Through the storm we saw three umbrellas bobbing up and down in fierce combat with the weather. Then we saw the umbrellas beaten and the holders take to flight. It was three enthusiastic lady astronomers from the C.'s. They arrived breathless and wet, and dry shawls and smelling salts were needed for their recovery. Then we set to work observing the clouds which were flying rapidly across the sky, but still persistent in hiding the sun. N., to beguile the time, gave a short discourse on the great event that was taking place, but I am not quite sure that any one of us was perfectly clear as to what were to be its particular scientific results. The youngest of the party, having been last at school, and being filled with a natural desire to show that she had brought away therefrom much valuable information, said that the sun's distance from the earth was estimated variously at ninety-two and ninety-five millions of miles, and that now the mean distance would be accurately ascertained. I added to this certain facts from the *Illustrated London News*, and as I carefully concealed the source, I was looked upon as much the most learned of the party. Meanwhile, we kept a look-out for the sun, and each in turn tried to see him through the clouds, with no effect save that all the noses of the party were blackened with the smoked glass, which each insisted on trying, as well as the ink-and-water device. At last the clouds began to lift. It was close on 8. The transit must be nearly complete. Through a break in the clouds the sun appeared. A fresh scamble, but no luck. He had gone before we had "got him in the tube." But the clouds were tearing along, and in five minutes more the sun was clear from them all. This time, through the ink, we fixed his majesty, and just on the edge of the disc the black spot was still visible. The delight of our visitors was great; they all vowed they saw it, a fact I was rude enough to doubt, as it was by no means easy to make out the tiny bit of Venus still left. The sun was clear from her, and all was over. I saw no singular effects at the moment of egress, such as was foretold, but eager young women are not the best assistants for a careful solar observation. What with fear of being blinded and fear of occupying too much of the telescope, my observation was not such as would have contented the Astronomer Royal.